UNITED
NATIONS

A E

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

A/51/186
E/1996/80
11 July 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifty-first session
Item 98 (c) of the preliminary list*
ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Substantive session of 1996
Agenda item 6 (h)
ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL
QUESTIONS: INTERNATIONAL
DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER
REDUCTION

International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

In response to the request formulated by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/117 A of 20 December 1995, the present report contains information on the implementation of the International Framework of Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The report provides an overview of critical needs for enhancing the distinct programme and coordination capabilities of the International Framework of Action in relation to major strategic challenges in the fields of sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. It presents opportunities for action to meet those needs by improving the recognition of natural disaster reduction as a cross-cutting issue of sustainable development. The report relates natural disaster reduction to the United Nations coordinated approach to the implementation of global action plans in the context of the evaluation and overall review of Agenda 21, and contains proposals on the structure and contents of the preparatory process for the closing event of the Decade, to be convened before the year 2000.

* A/51/50.

96-16694 (E) 160796 170796

/...

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1 - 5	3
II.	PROGRESS IN DISASTER REDUCTION	6 - 24	3
III.	PROCESS FOR PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT	25 - 35	7
	A. Basic needs	25 - 27	7
	B. The closing event of the Decade	28 - 29	8
	C. The preparatory process	30 - 35	8
IV.	FRAMEWORK	36 - 72	9
	A. Special High-level Council	36 - 37	9
	B. Scientific and Technical Committee	38 - 44	10
	C. Contact Group	45 - 46	11
	D. National committees	47 - 48	11
	E. Inter-agency Steering Committee	49 - 52	12
	F. Coordination within the United Nations system	53 - 56	12
	G. Secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction	57 - 62	13
	H. Trust Fund for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction	63 - 65	14
	I. Thematic and operational linkages	66 - 72	15
V.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	73 - 75	16

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Since the proclamation by the General Assembly, in its resolution 44/236 of 22 December 1989, of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, concerted international efforts have been made to reduce the effects of natural disasters and similar emergencies through the International Framework of Action for the Decade (resolution 44/236, annex). The Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World, adopted by the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, held in Yokohama, Japan, in May 1994, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/22 A of 2 December 1994, contains the guiding principles and provides a plan of action for the realization of the Decade's goals in local communities and at the national, regional and international levels.

2. A variety of contributors from all involved sectors have become partners in applying the concept of the Decade. General Assembly resolutions 49/22 A and 49/22 B of 20 December 1994, the last biennial report on activities submitted to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session (A/50/201-E/1995/74), and the report on early-warning capacities of the United Nations system with regard to natural disasters (A/50/526) have provided specific examples of disaster-reduction activities being pursued around the world. Those reports have highlighted the need for more effective coordination in disseminating and applying disaster-reduction knowledge and action.

3. The report to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session on financial issues of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/50/521) pointed to the need for improved funding security for all aspects of the Decade and for effective synergies within the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat.

4. In adopting resolution 50/117 A of 20 December 1995, the General Assembly reiterated the importance of convening a closing event of the Decade. The event would facilitate the full integration of disaster reduction into sustainable development and environmental protection by the year 2000 and would map a comprehensive strategy for disaster reduction in the twenty-first century. In this respect, disaster reduction is related to agendas for national measures and to international cooperation in implementing the action plans of the recent United Nations thematic conferences.

5. The General Assembly further requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals on how the distinct programme and coordination capability of the secretariat of the Decade might be enhanced so as to enable it to effectively coordinate the activities of the Decade and promote the integration of natural disaster reduction into the sustainable development process.

II. PROGRESS IN DISASTER REDUCTION

6. Early in the Decade, the international scientific community took the lead, within the framework of the Decade, to demonstrate the feasibility of systematic natural disaster reduction for the protection of national assets and development accomplishments. Practical targets were established by the Scientific and

Technical Committee of the Decade, which remain as valid today as when they were conceived at the beginning of the Decade. Based on the overall recognition by the Member States of the United Nations of the merits of disaster reduction, many countries are proceeding to attain those targets through their own policy initiatives and through the commitment of essential human and material resources. Other countries are still in the process of recognizing the threat posed by natural disasters and of developing preventive strategies in order to protect their national assets.

7. Organizations of the United Nations system have contributed significant policy initiatives and have initiated programmes to promote disaster-reduction practices. These examples have been specifically referred to in earlier reports to the General Assembly. A comprehensive overview of activities will be provided in the regular biennial report on the Decade, to be presented to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

8. The major United Nations conferences convened in the 1990s have highlighted the need to build national and local capacities in order firmly to integrate disaster-reduction measures into sustainable development programmes. The first of these, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, produced the global framework for sustainable development in Agenda 21.

9. Since the Rio Conference, the Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados, and the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, held in Yokohama in 1994, successive global commitments have been made at the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994; the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995); the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), and most recently, the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Istanbul, June 1996). One notable outcome of the Yokohama Conference was the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action, which can best be achieved by integrating it with the coordinated implementation of action plans of the other international conferences.

10. The commitment to concerted international action for disaster reduction has broadened the appeal of disaster reduction. Natural hazards are recognized as having an intrinsic relationship with human-induced phenomena, such as technological or ecological conditions, which have an adverse impact on the environment. The effects of natural hazards, environmental degradation and sustainable development are also seen to contribute to involuntary mass movements of populations.

11. The process has benefited, in particular, from the commitment and participation of the developing countries in the Decade and in the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction in Yokohama. The developing countries have been active both on the political front, through the mechanism of the Group of 77, and through the practical involvement of all sectors of their society at the local, national, subregional and regional levels. The Group of 77 has recognized that disaster reduction can reduce the need for disaster relief and contribute effectively to the achievement of sustainable development.

12. Accelerated recognition of disaster reduction is also being encouraged by recent technological and commercial developments. The countries of the Group of Seven, working in a partnership with the information technology industry, have identified improved natural hazard warnings and communications as one priority area of interest, in conjunction with the opportunity of sharing technology with developing countries. As rapid advances in international telecommunications and information technology become global and more accessible to all Member States at reasonable cost, they will make possible the real-time dissemination of disaster-reduction experience and practices. In this context, multi-sectoral efforts towards an international convention on coordinated telecommunications use in disaster mitigation and response must be encouraged.

13. A few examples will demonstrate the vitality and range of interests that are now incorporating disaster awareness and reduction practices into mainstream activities. Experiences are being shared from recent disasters like the great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, which struck Kobe in Japan in January 1995. Based on this and similar experiences, the United States of America and Japan recently agreed that natural disaster reduction should be included on the countries' common agenda for cooperation at the highest level. Both countries pledged to strengthen international networks for exchanging early warning data on natural disasters and also to share technical experience gained from lessons about seismic hazards. Japan has also taken an initiative with its partners in Asia to improve disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation on the basis of the lessons learned from the Kobe earthquake.

14. Sharing experiences and information among industrialized and developing countries provided the rationale for bringing together a wide range of professions and representatives of the International Framework of Action of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction to the Pan-Pacific Conference on Natural Hazards in 1996 in Vancouver, Canada. The meeting, which was organized by private organizations, industry, non-governmental organizations and national and local government officials, brought together participants involved in disaster-reduction activities from North and South America, Asia and the Pacific. This is a significant example of how international collaboration can join public policy makers, local community interests and commercial concerns for sharing of disaster-reduction experiences.

15. Similar meetings sponsored jointly by regional institutions and Governments have been held during the past year in South America, in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and in the Pacific. Other events will be held in Europe.

16. The national association responsible for promoting Decade affairs in South Africa convened a subregional conference in March 1996. The meeting explicitly linked disaster reduction with national development objectives. In addition to fostering efforts for disaster reduction within South Africa, the participation of officials from southern Africa also provided an impetus to the strengthening of regional relationships.

17. Both China and the United States have increased their efforts to implement national strategies for disaster mitigation. In each case, there was a common

recognition that neither of these countries' economies could continue to remain as vulnerable to the increasing severity of natural disasters.

18. In many countries, often with external support, the policy and technical requirements of disaster reduction are also being addressed at the national level. Resulting activities include national programmes of risk assessment, the establishment of institutional abilities with a designated national authority to address disaster reduction or conducting an inventory of existing professional resources available within a country. These developments are often integrated in, or resulting from, regional or intergovernmental collaboration such as within the European Union (EU) or CIS.

19. Perhaps most importantly, more countries are analysing their human resource requirements for disaster mitigation and are taking measures to provide the necessary education and training. Programmes such as the Disaster Management Training Programme, jointly conducted by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have demonstrated how the cost-effective investment of resources into risk analysis and preventive capabilities can initiate programmes which are integrated into national planning.

20. In the private sector, both small, local enterprises and major international corporations are more aware of the need to reduce their vulnerability to natural disasters. They are increasingly developing countermeasures that ensure their business continuity. In some countries, engineering firms have identified expanding markets in hazard assessment, earth observation technology and risk management. This has often developed as a result of environmental impact assessments and dialogue between the public and private sectors.

21. Major international re-insurance firms have mounted advertising campaigns, directed towards public policy authorities and private investors alike, to inform about the benefits of disaster mitigation. Similarly, local insurance agencies are becoming more active in risk management by advising communities how to safeguard dwellings from cyclone or flood damage. Elsewhere, insurance interests are teaming up with public officials to give greater emphasis to the social and physical vulnerabilities of human settlements and infrastructure investment, when drafting legislation on land-use planning, natural resource management and environmental protection. An international conference sponsored by the Decade was held in Vladivostok, in the Russian Federation, in 1996 to address the issue of the insurance and disaster mitigation.

22. Progress to date has not been uniform, nor has it been consistent throughout the world. However, what must be appreciated and capitalized upon at the present stage of the Decade is the increasing diversity and variety of initiatives in the field of disaster reduction. Many of those initiatives are generated and undertaken outside activities of the United Nations, but they are indirectly the result of the promotional role which the United Nations system has played in fostering those developments. There is a noticeable growth in the perceived relevance of disaster reduction by all concerned sectors, with particular emphasis in the private domain. This suggests that the ultimate success of the Decade will rest more with the actions and commitments of those

international, national and local community partners which exist beyond the United Nations. With the Decade entering its eighth year in 1997, it becomes necessary to consolidate these interests even more firmly. The closing event of the Decade, and in particular the process leading up to it, provide the mechanism.

23. The United Nations retains a critical role in ensuring that the momentum that has developed for enhancing natural disaster reduction in the world is maintained. The impact of individual initiatives should not become limited through isolated knowledge. The United Nations system must encourage information exchange to enhance education, training and the transfer of knowledge and technology.

24. The time has now arrived to consolidate existing progress in natural disaster reduction and link it firmly with economic and social development and environmental protection, which together form the mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development. With the Decade, the United Nations has established a mechanism to support the international community's efforts to achieve social stability and economic well-being.

III. PROCESS FOR PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

A. Basic needs

25. The World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction determined the development of a comprehensive and effective strategy for disaster reduction beyond the Decade and into the twenty-first century as the key requirement for the remaining years of the Decade. Action in this respect has to start now, and in a coordinated and structured fashion. As elaborated in the report on the Decade to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, this strategy will have to encompass both substantive and organizational aspects. It should emerge as the result of a process with full participation of all concerned sectors. A critical need to be pursued for institutional consolidation is the identification and active engagement of key collaborating and/or sponsoring organizations presently involved in various aspects of implementing disaster reduction throughout the world. The current International Framework for Action for the Decade provides the initial basis to proceed.

26. Options for future forms of organization after the Decade has come to a close need to be developed. These may include the establishment of an appropriate private facility. Possibilities include an international non-governmental organization, a foundation underwritten by national Governments and other concerned bodies, or an internationally recognized centre of excellence accommodated by a university or technical institution. The options will also have to recognize the ongoing interests and responsibilities of the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations.

27. The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction must encourage all such initiatives and evaluate their potential in the process towards the closing event. The secretariat for the Decade will explore those feasibilities expeditiously.

B. The closing event of the Decade

28. General Assembly resolution 49/22 A already provides the mechanism to initiate the process of international coordination towards the evaluation of the Decade's success and the options for sustained disaster reduction activities in the future. By that resolution, the Assembly decided to convene an event before the year 2000 to carry out an overall review of the accomplishments of the Decade and to map a strategy for continued disaster reduction activities into the twenty-first century. This decision was confirmed and further elaborated during the fiftieth session of the Assembly with the adoption of resolution 50/117 A, in which the Assembly noted the need for sectoral and cross-sectoral meetings to facilitate the full integration of disaster reduction into the substantive efforts for sustainable development and environmental protection by the year 2000.

29. The closing event of the Decade will be the culmination of a process that started with the preparatory phase in 1987. The Decade has been conceived by the scientific sector and adopted by the United Nations system as a concept and mechanism within humanitarian and development activities. It has also been applied by entities outside the United Nations system. Consequently, the closing event itself, and the process leading towards it, will on the one hand be an integral part of United Nations formal action and will also draw upon sectors outside the United Nations. The closing event and its preparatory process will have to be productive and cost-effective.

C. The preparatory process

30. The closing event of the Decade will be convened under the auspices of the United Nations. Its structure, including the preparatory activities, will be based on the successful experience of the Yokohama Conference, which adopted a multidisciplinary approach to ensure participation of all concerned sectors of society, assembled within the International Framework of Action for the Decade.

31. The process towards the closing event will be built around a preparatory committee with equitable regional composition, which will develop the agenda for the closing event, its precise framework of participation, its intended outcome and proposals for the follow-up into the twenty-first century. The preparatory committee will organize two to three meetings in Geneva, in 1997, 1998 and, if necessary, in 1999. The work of the Preparatory Committee will take into account the work of committees for the Decade, the results of regional preparatory activities and other relevant entities as appropriate.

32. In addition to the formal preparatory process, maximum use will be made of thematic or regional events beyond the United Nations system to include seminars, workshops, symposia or conferences relevant to natural disaster reduction.

33. The General Assembly in resolution 50/117 A designated the secretariat of the Decade as the substantive secretariat for the preparation of the closing event. In executing this function and expected parallel activities, the secretariat for the Decade will involve all relevant bodies of the United

Nations system and will draw on the support of other international organizations, intergovernmental organizations and Governments. Within the formal preparatory process, particular attention will be paid to effective coordination of all concerned United Nations agencies and organizations through the inter-agency Steering Committee for the Decade and its Working Group.

34. In thematic terms, the preparatory process will be structured around the targets and overall objective of the Decade, as laid down in the annex to General Assembly resolution 44/236, proclaiming the Decade. It will take into consideration the findings of the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction of May 1994 and the resulting Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action. It will also consider relevant action plans of other United Nations conferences related to the consequences of natural disasters and to the need for disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation.

35. Key areas of attention comprise first the analysis and reduction of vulnerability to natural hazards through natural disaster reduction, including the development of sound methodologies for the assessment of social and economic impacts of natural disasters and the cost-effectiveness of preventive action. Another critical area involves the improvement of the capabilities of the United Nations system and other concerned entities for early warning for natural disasters, which is closely linked with improved information management and communication capabilities. The establishment of organized network capabilities among all sectors of the International Framework of Action for the Decade is a particularly important aspect for individual members and institutions of the scientific and technical communities. Such networking is dependent upon the development of a sustained clearing-house capability within the Framework of Action for the collation and dissemination of best practices in natural disaster reduction. Promotion and awareness-raising on natural disaster reduction, including specialized publications and the effective and interdisciplinary application of scientific and technical knowledge in education and training, will be maintained. Finally, the integration of disaster reduction into national planning with the full participatory involvement of local authorities and local communities at risk represents a major challenge for the successful implementation of the Decade.

IV. FRAMEWORK

A. Special High-level Council

36. A specific proposal to establish a new Special High-level Council in 1997, in line with the recommendations of General Assembly resolution 49/22 A, has been prepared by the secretariat for the Decade. It foresees 5 to 10 internationally renowned individuals representing all regions of the world, who can influence high-profile funding initiatives and sustained political commitment on a global scale. The revised Council will be serviced in close synergy with the scientific and technical abilities of the Scientific and Technical Committee. The effectiveness of a reconstituted Special High-level Council is closely linked with advocacy for natural disaster reduction within the context of sustainable development. It is also dependent on the continuing functioning of the other components of the International Framework of Action for

the Decade, in particular its secretariat within the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

37. Active functioning national committees are an essential prerequisite for a credible and feasible reconstitution of the Special High-level Council to support the intended political and advocacy role of future members of the Council.

B. Scientific and Technical Committee

38. The Scientific and Technical Committee met for its seventh session in Moscow in March 1996, at the invitation and with the financial support of the Ministry of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence of the Russian Federation. With the completion of the second rotation of Committee members, eight new members joined the Committee at its seventh session.

39. At the seventh session, the members of the Committee issued a statement to draw the attention of the United Nations and of the international community to the importance of disaster reduction within the development dimension and to the need for adequate resources within the context of technical cooperation. In addition, the statement expressed concern about the continuing lack of funds for the secretariat of the Decade.

40. In keeping with previous practice the Scientific and Technical Committee proceeded to discuss future programme requirements for three key subject areas of activity. First, training, research and the practical application of measures for disaster reduction provided a frame of reference to identify means to extend existing knowledge and experience to a larger audience of potential implementors. Existing organizational partnerships among technical and academic institutions, as well as between government agencies and non-governmental organizations on a regional basis were cited as appropriate mechanisms for disaster training and research.

41. The current status of the Decade's programme initiatives in information systems and in data management systems was the second area of focus for the Committee. The review included present opportunities and future considerations for the application of communications, space technologies and remote sensing for sustained disaster reduction practices. Those technologies also support both dissemination of early warning information and development of its capacities. This will be the subject of a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, in 1997, in response to resolution 50/117 B.

42. The Third area of attention was the continued utility of demonstration projects and their role in transmitting knowledge and newly established experience. The secretariat of the Decade has undertaken a review of existing demonstration projects to highlight those activities which can be useful in expanding the use of disaster reduction techniques. The report of the Scientific and Technical Committee, on its seventh session, and its recommendations, are available from the secretariat for the Decade. 1/

43. In seeking to become more directly involved on both sectoral and geographical issues and to give attention to the practical application of disaster reduction measures, the members of the Scientific and Technical Committee created working groups to provide added impetus to the following areas of activity: training; demonstration projects; communications and information management; early warning systems; and economic and preventive planning aspects.

44. The Committee agreed that the next session would focus on the closing process of the Decade and the importance of economic and preventive planning aspects of disaster reduction. At the next meeting of the Committee, which will be hosted in Paris by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and will be held jointly with the Inter-agency Steering Committee at the end of 1996, consideration will also be given to the relationships between the two Committees and their respective roles in the process of transition into the post-Decade period.

C. Contact Group

45. During the reporting period, the informal open-ended Contact Group of countries and United Nations agencies and organizations established at Geneva has continued, under the chairmanship of the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations Office at Geneva, to serve as an instrument for dialogue and advice on all major thematic issues relating to the Decade. The Group's core group has met regularly, placing an emphasis on enhancing the possibilities of integrating natural disaster reduction into sustainable development. This has been done by considering the results of the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction of May 1994 within a coordinated approach of the United Nations system towards implementing global action plans.

46. The Group has pointed out the potential benefits of a similar mechanism in New York with specific emphasis on relating the Decade to the work of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group of the General Assembly on an Agenda for Development, as well as ensuring involvement in the review process of Agenda 21. These actions will provide further impetus to the full participation and involvement of Member States into the substantive and organizational preparations for the Decade's closing event.

D. National committees

47. The national committee concept represents the backbone for the successful implementation of the Decade's targets and overall objective by 1999. The activities are being implemented nationally. This trend is gaining momentum as more national authorities and specific agencies announce strategic disaster-mitigation initiatives. It is encouraging that an increasing number of national entities have become involved through their participation in programmes for the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, with more than 60 countries reporting their activities in 1995. Many of those activities were used to initiate longer-term programmes on the theme "Women and Children - Key to Prevention". The special publication for children and schoolteachers used to

promote the theme has proved to be a popular vehicle for many national committees.

48. Some of the national committees work well, but many more require urgent advice and technical or collaborative support on how to progress in line with the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action. As more national committees are approaching the secretariat of the Decade for assistance in formulating national disaster-reduction strategies and in seeking expert support, the secretariat's ability to serve the national committees effectively is a crucial factor for the remaining years of the Decade. The secretariat must be able to communicate with national committees through correspondence, visits, meetings and conferences. Many national committees provide an organizational option for national-level disaster reduction beyond the year 2000. They will have to be firmly integrated in the Decade's ultimate evaluation of success.

E. Inter-agency Steering Committee

49. The Working Group of the Inter-agency Steering Committee for the Decade has continued to provide a valuable forum for coordinating the implementation of programmes for the Decade. A meeting of the group in January 1996 set the framework and priorities for inter-agency approaches during the reporting period, including efforts to draw attention to disaster reduction within the respective governing boards of the concerned United Nations agencies and organizations.

50. The Working Group has agreed on the need to sustain attention on the key thematic issues of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action. The members of the Working Group have been actively involved in the Decade's initiative to improve the international coordination of early warning systems, as well as in the development of a basic policy on training and education for the application of scientific knowledge in disaster-reduction practice.

51. The Working Group is planning a formal session of the Steering Committee at the end of 1996, to launch the preparatory process for the closing event of the Decade within the United Nations system. The Committee will develop a work plan for concrete action during the remaining years of the Decade.

52. In addition, the Working Group has contributed in the preparation of the report on natural and environmental disasters in small island developing States for the fourth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The report has been finalized by the secretariat of the Decade and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

F. Coordination within the United Nations system

53. Within the United Nations Secretariat, the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction has enjoyed cooperation with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and the Department for Development Support and Management Services. Apart from the issue of natural and environmental disasters in small island developing States

and the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Small Island Developing States, cooperation with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development has extended to the design of indicators for human and economic losses due to natural disasters. The Department for Development Support and Management Services is proceeding to give greater attention to disaster-reduction issues, having developed a global programme for the integration of public administration and the science of disasters.

54. The agencies and organizations of the United Nations system have continued their active involvement in activities of the Decade and the sectoral promotion of disaster-reduction issues. These include the World Health Organization (WHO), WMO and UNESCO and its International Oceanographic Commission.

55. The importance of the efforts being made at country level to apply disaster-reduction awareness and practices in the context of United Nations development programmes should be noted. The interest and the involvement of United Nations resident coordinators and resident representatives of UNDP have given considerable impetus to this process. Increasingly, established development planning and coordinating mechanisms such as the country strategy note are used to accommodate a greater awareness of disaster implications in national developmental planning efforts. This development supports the integration of comprehensive risk assessments and mitigation plans into the national development process.

56. With a view to formulating the global natural disaster-reduction strategy for the twenty-first century called for by the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, cooperation between the International Framework of Action for the Decade and the United Nations development programmes, agencies and organizations should be strengthened further.

G. Secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

57. The main activities of the secretariat of the Decade during the reporting period involve three major areas. The first is servicing the International Framework for Action. The Scientific and Technical Committee is the primary means of the secretariat for communicating with the scientific community. A second responsibility is the promotion of the concept of the Decade through public information, awareness-raising and training, including the active promotion of disaster reduction. Finally, the active involvement of staff in relevant legislative and programme activities of the United Nations system has continued.

58. In addition, the secretariat has participated in the strategic orientation and analysis of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, of which the Decade is an integral part. This exercise has reaffirmed natural disaster reduction and the Decade as core activities of the Department and contributed to the development of a detailed work plan for 1996-1997 and a related financial strategy.

59. The secretariat of the Decade has also continued its thematic project involvement, including studies on socio-economic and legal aspects of disasters and a global project for disaster resistant urbanization and seismic risk assessment in urban areas (RADIUS).

60. The 1995 International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction was very successful. The campaign developed national capacities to encourage proactive roles for women and children before disaster strikes. More than three times as many organizations reported activities to the Decade secretariat as in 1994. Over 70 round tables and conferences addressed the theme of the Day worldwide, many of them being conducted at high level and with tangible outcomes. A new booklet, "Learning about Natural Disasters", was a great success, with over 200,000 copies produced in eight languages by the Decade secretariat and many partners around the world. Requests for translation into 15 additional local languages and 50,000 requests for additional copies of the booklet remain unfulfilled pending additional funding.

61. Other major publications issued during 1995 included Stop Disasters magazine, the Decade newsletter for the Americas produced in Costa Rica in cooperation with the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), three reports on regional African workshops and the Yokohama Message, Strategy and Plan of Action from the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction. In 1995-1996, the secretariat arranged for representation and distribution of materials for more than 70 conferences around the world.

62. The issue of "Cities at Risk" was selected as the 1996 campaign theme for the Decade to complement Habitat II. The campaign includes an international poster competition, an Internet conference and a special publication of Stop Disasters. Circulars, posters and publications intended to help countries, national committees and local community organizations plan their own campaigns have also been distributed.

H. Trust Fund for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

63. In response to a request made by the Economic and Social Council in 1995, a report on the core functions of the secretariat of the Decade and its financing was presented to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session (A/50/521). The report has formed the basis for a special funding appeal the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs has presented on behalf of the Decade in January 1996. The financial data of the report have also been integrated into the overall financial strategy of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which has been presented to the donor community during the first quarter of 1996. The annual requirement of the secretariat of the Decade, necessary for the execution of its core functions, amounts to $4.2 million.

64. During the reporting period, traditional donors to the Decade have continued their support. This has been crucial for the continuity of the secretariat of the Decade. Contributions have been received from Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of

America and the Commission of the European Communities. Donations were also received from the Australian Coordinating Committee for the Decade, UNICEF and the private sector. In addition, the secretariat benefits from the contribution in kind of a senior scientific expert and a Junior Professional Officer from Japan.

65. No additional funding commitments have resulted from the appeal beyond the traditional donors. The secretariat of the Decade calls upon other Member States for support.

I. Thematic and operational linkages

66. The report on natural and environmental diasters presented to the Commission on Natural Disaster Reduction at its fourth session in New York in April 1996 in the context of the progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States points out: 2/

> "The full recognition of the interdependence and the linkages between natural disaster reduction and the achievement of sustainable development is a decisive prerequisite for all progress both at the policy level and at the operational level. Any notion that disaster management is limited to action in specific disaster situations, and by special sectors of society only, is detrimental to the objective of saving lives and protecting property from natural and environmental disasters. Equally, there is a need to avoid the erroneous perception among some decision makers and the public that disasters are, by definition, synonymous with man-made or politically induced emergency situations. Natural and environmental hazards constitute a major threat to both developing and industrialized countries; natural and environmental disasters kill and maim people and can heavily disrupt the long-term economic and socials stability of societies. Concepts and measures to counter this threat deserve the highest possible attention."

67. The statement can be quoted as the theme for integrating natural disaster reduction as a cross-cutting issue into activities that contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. This notion has also been explicitly expressed in the General Assembly's Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations (resolution 50/6), whereby international cooperation for development, including natural disaster reduction, aims at fostering economic growth, social development, environmental protection and justice.

68. The benefits of natural disaster reduction are also considered in the work of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group of the General Assembly on an Agenda for Development. Section 7, "Humanitarian issues and development", of chapter II of the synthesis text on the Agenda for Development contains a subsection on early warning, prevention, preparedness and reduction of natural disasters. The text notes that disaster prevention and mitigation are of primary importance for reducing the need for disaster relief and calls for their integration into national strategies and programmes for sustainable development.

69. With a view to institutional issues and follow-up, the above-mentioned synthesis text on the Agenda for Development states in its chapter III that there is an urgent need for an integrated, interrelated and coherent implementation and follow-up at the national, subregional, regional and international levels of the recommendations and commitments of recent United Nations major conferences and agreements on development. The implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action will have to take due account of this commitment towards a coordinated approach. This must include consideration and involvement of the Decade in the forthcoming evaluation and overall review of Agenda 21, scheduled to take place during a special session of the General Assembly in 1997.

70. The high-level segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in 1995 devoted its debate to development in Africa, including the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in 1990s. The summary of the debate by the President of the Council notes that Africa is one of the continents prone to natural disasters which adversely affect development efforts. It states that programmes for disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation in accordance with the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World and its Programme of Action should be instituted to assist Africa to cope with the effects of natural disasters. 3/

71. The need and potential for disaster reduction as laid down in the concept and objectives of the Decade have also been considered in relation to the issue of mass movements of populations, whether as refugees or displaced populations. In the context of activities organized, inter alia, by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the reduction of disasters has been recognized as a means to reduce involuntary mass movements of populations resulting from sudden-onset natural or environmental disasters and similar emergencies.

72. In the context of the work of the Commission on Human Rights, the Decade's preventive, pre-disaster actions are seen as a contribution to the collective and individual protection of human rights through securing human life and ensuring basic requirements such as food, shelter and health. In this respect, the report on human rights and the environment submitted to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-second session 4/ noted the relationship between disaster reduction and human rights issues.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

73. The ultimate objective of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction is to save lives and to protect material resources. This is achieved through the reduction of the vulnerability of communities at risk. This requires a viable basis for international cooperation in disaster-reduction activities to ensure the accomplishment of sustainable development into the twenty-first century. The most critical needs are the following:

(a) Acceptance must be gained among policy makers that disaster reduction is an investment in the protection of national assets;

(b) Concerted efforts must be made to translate existing knowledge into practice;

(c) Equitable access to the protection from natural disaster must be ensured for all, in developing and industrialized countries alike;

(d) The gap remaining between the expectations that have been raised for concerted multilateral support for disaster reduction and the present realities must be closed;

(e) International strategies for natural disaster reduction must be translated into concrete support for the development of national capabilities to protect people;

(f) The Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action of the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction must be fully integrated into the concerted approach towards the implementation of the action plans of all recent global United Nations conferences;

(g) The international community's commitment to the International Framework of Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction must be translated, for the period of the Decade, into concrete support through the adequate provision of human and financial resources.

74. Urgent actions need to be taken by the Member States. Beyond the endorsements of disaster reduction concepts, concrete actions are essential to address the remaining tasks effectively. These include the following:

(a) The International Framework of Action is to develop options for institutional arrangements required by the year 2000 in order to maintain coordinated measures of disaster reduction beyond the Decade;

(b) United Nations agencies and organizations are to incorporate disaster reduction in activities of national planning;

(c) The Commission on Sustainable Development should be requested to consider natural disaster reduction as a cross-cutting issue in the evaluation and overall review of Agenda 21;

(d) National committees for the Decade and other partners in the International Framework of Action should solicit a more active involvement of the private sector in natural disaster reduction, including the promotion of commercial potential in research, technical applications and the provision of goods and services;

(e) The secretariat for the Decade should coordinate a comprehensive and coherent programme of information management and dissemination for natural disaster reduction;

(f) All partners in the International Framework of Action for the Decade, in particular the scientific and technical community, should participate in interdisciplinary and multisectoral networks;

(g) The United Nations is to initiate the preparatory process for the Decade's closing event, including the provision of the necessary resources, in order to ensure the mapping of a comprehensive disaster reduction strategy into the twenty-first century before the year 2000.

75. As previously referred to in the Yokohama message, 5/ the Decade stands at a crossroads. The United Nations and the world community can positively affect the course of events by reducing the suffering from natural disasters. Action is needed now to implement the policies and goals embodied in the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

Notes

1/ IDNDR/STC/1996/4.

2/ E/CN.17/1996/20/Add.1, para. 53.

3/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth session, Supplement No. 3 (A/50/3/Rev.1), chap. II, para. 29.

4/ E/CN.4/1996/23.

5/ A/CONF.172/9.